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ABSTRACT

Theorists have predicted that individuals in a relationship initially follow social norms and later follow the mutually-agreed-upon norms which have evolved from the relationship. Since social norms prescribe sex-stereotyped behavior, an androgynous person may initially behave in a sex-typed way. Same-sex pairs (N=26) of undergraduates, matched on similar or dissimilar Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) scores, rated themselves once and their partners at two different times on the BSRI. "Liking for other" and "perception of other's liking" scales were also completed twice. Results indicated that subjects did not change in their perceptions of partners toward congruence with the partner's perception of self in terms of liking, perceived liking, and similarity on the BSRI. The finding that subjects' perceptions of partners on the BSRI did not change over time may be attributed to the idea that the partners did not actually develop a relationship during the course of the study. (Author/NRB)

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Friendships: From Cultural Guidelines to Mutually Agreed Upon Norms*

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Friendships: From Cultural Guidelines to Mutually-Agreed-Upon Norms

The present study is one of change over time in the perception of others in a friendship context. This change is investigated through the study of social roles. Social roles facilitate interpersonal interaction in two very important ways:

1. They free us from the responsibility of deciding every moment what would constitute appropriate behavior; and
2. They provide us with guidelines to evaluate the appropriateness of the behavior of others.

Most of our social interactions, especially those at the superficial level (Levinger & Snoek, 1972), are guided by norms consistent with our social roles. Theorists of relationship development, however, believe that interaction moves from a stereotypic behavior pattern to one guided by mutually-agreed-upon norms evolved through a continuing shared history of experience and burgeoning understanding of each other (Altman & Taylor, 1974; Levinger & Snoek, 1972). Thus, stereotypic behavior is thought to give way to the expression of individuality and the unique character of the relationship. This would suggest that an individual who is androgynous, i.e., who has both masculine and feminine characteristics, will recognize and respond to social cues calling for stereotypic, sex behavior patterns. Yet, given time in a relationship, it will no longer be necessary to maintain consistency with cultural norms, so the individual will eventually behave in an androgynous or non-stereotypic way.

Persons may relax their interpersonal behavior for one of two reasons. First, they may feel comfortable in the relationship, and trusting enough of the other, to behave in a way consistent with their self-perception, even if such behavior flies in the face of the accepted role. Second, it

may have become clear through interaction, that the relationship will not be continued or maintained. In this case, the individual may not care if the social norms are violated. Since the decision to forego or terminate the bond has already been made, the other's acceptance or rejection is no longer of concern. Thus, persons who can initially be described as behaving in a way consistent with role prescriptions may, in some interpersonal settings, express their individuality.

It is possible that the behavior of individuals does not change over time in the relationship, but that partners perceive behavior as becoming less stereotypic. The more likely occurrence, however, is that real change does occur and person's (P's) perception of other (O) comes closer to O's perception of self with time (Newcomb, 1961). These changes are believed to be more likely to occur if the individuals involved are perceived to be similar to each other initially. Perceived similarity is believed to lead to attraction (Byrne, 1971) which is thought to result in continued interaction. Continued interaction with a similar O increases the probability of reciprocal liking (Brockner & Sway, 1976; Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1975; Newcomb, 1961). Confusion exists as to whether similarity, e.g., in sex role behavior, is an important factor in relationship development once the relationship progresses beyond the superficial level. The similarity paradigm (Byrne, 1971) would predict that it is. This prediction has been both supported (Newcomb, 1961) and refuted (Centers, 1975) and merits additional investigation.

Probably the most obvious and ubiquitous social roles are those assigned on the basis of gender. In our culture, we expect males to behave in a certain way, and females to behave in a different way. We assume

that certain personality characteristics are concomitant with maleness or femaleness (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmriech & Stapp, 1974). For example, in a heterosexual situation, we expect the male to be dominant and ask his female partner for a date. Females seem to accept this state of affairs by being reluctant to do the asking themselves. Yet, as the relationship progresses, it would not be uncommon for the female to initiate discussion about the next contact, a behavior which may be consistent with her personality. Thus, an androgynous person, in a new interpersonal setting, may be perceived as masculine or feminine, a perception consistent with the person's behavior. Later, given a history of interaction and development of an intimate bond, the individual's behavior is likely to have become more androgynous, and the perception of the behavior by the partner should reflect this change. Change in behavior in relation to sex role norms is under investigation in this study.

Several questions have been raised which are investigated in this research:

1. Does the perception of O by P change, relative to sex role norms, given a history of interaction; i.e., is O perceived less stereotypically over time;
2. Should such a change in perception occur, does P's perception of O align with O's perception of O over time;
3. Should such a change in perception occur, is it more likely to occur when P and O are similar in their sex role orientation; and
4. Should such a change in perception occur, is it more likely to occur when there is a strong feeling of liking for O?

Method

Sample. Fifty-two students (42 females and 10 males) enrolled in a junior-level, three credit hour, family studies course in the fall semester at a large mid-western university participated in the study. The ages of the students ranged from 19 to 40 with 69.21% aged 20-22 and 11.54% aged 23-25. Most, 92.31% were juniors and seniors. Students' estimates of their parents combined annual income, or theirs and their partners if they were married and independent, placed most of them in the middle class. Seventy-three per cent estimated yearly income at greater than or equal to $20,000. Most, 67.31% were never married and 23.08% were in their first marriage.

Students were given the option of participating in the research as a substitution for one of three written assignments, and were free to withdraw their participation at any time provided an alternative, proportional assignment was completed.

Procedure. Students completed an informed consent form and rated themselves on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) in the third week of the semester, after enrollment had stabilized. These scores were assumed to be stable over time (Bem, 1974). Respondents were told they were participating in a longitudinal study of personal influences on relationship processes.

Students were assigned to one of two relationship conditions, similar or dissimilar, according to their self-ratings on the BSRI. BSRI scores were computed according to the method used by LaFrance and Carmen (1980). There were 13 similar pairs (e.g., androgynous with androgynous) and 13 dissimilar pairs (e.g., sex-typed with androgynous) matched according to

their classification as sex-typed, cross-sex typed, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Because of the uneven gender distribution of the sample, females were paired with females and males with males.

During one class session in the fourth week of the semester, respondents were asked to locate assigned seats and were given twenty minutes to get to know their partners. Students were told they would be asked questions about their partners at the end of the discussion period. Following this, each respondent completed a paper-and-pencil instrument containing three measures: the BSRI (Bem, 1974), on which they were to rate the person they just met, and two measures of liking. The first was a three item liking scale (Archer & Burleson, 1980) to assess degree of liking for the partner. Each item was responded to on an eleven-point scale ranging from not at all to as much as possible:

1. How much do you like your partner?
2. How much would you like to get to know your partner better?
3. How much would you like to have your partner as a close friend?

Respondents also completed a perception of partner's liking for self scale consisting of rephrased versions of the liking scale items (e.g., How much do you think your partner likes you?).

Following completion of the instrument, students were asked to continue to sit next to their partners for the remainder of the semester (eleven more weeks). They were encouraged to interact with each other frequently, participate in class activities together, and the like.

During the fourteenth week of the semester, the second set of instruments were completed again by each participant for the purpose of assessing changes over time. In addition, six items designed to measure relationship properties (i.e., how well they knew each other before they were matched,

how well they estimate they and their partners have gotten to know each other, and amount, frequency, and type of contact outside of class) were administered at this time.

Results

The three items measuring P's degree of liking for O were equally weighted and summed (Archer & Burleson, 1980) at time one and again at time two to form a P's liking for O index. Reliability (alpha) coefficients for this index were 0.93 at time one and 0.92 at time two. The three items measuring P's perception of O's liking for P were also weighted equally and summed at time one and again at time two to form a P's perception of O's liking for P index. Alpha coefficients for this index were 0.95 at time one and 0.93 at time two.

The eight liking indices, P's liking for O at time one and at time two, O's liking for P at time one and at time two, P's perception of O's liking for P at time one and at time two, and O's perception of P's liking for O at time one and at time two, were highly intercorrelated, using Kendall's tau for matched pairs.

Insert Table 1 about here

Because the liking indeces at time two seemed to be the strongest measures, subsequent analyses involving liking were confined to them.

In order to assess whether the other's estimate of the partner on the BSRI was different from the partner's score on the BSRI at time one and/or at time two, t-tests were performed to determine if the mean difference for each of the other's two estimates were significantly different from zero. All results were not significant.

Insert Table 2 about here

Not only were there no significant differences over time, partners estimate of the others' BSRI scores were highly correlated (using Kendall's tau for matched pairs) at both time one and time two with their own BSRI scores.

Insert Table 3 about here

That is, there appears to be no change over time in estimating the partner on the BSRI. Indeed, individuals have assessed their partners similarly to the way they assess themselves.

To assess the effects of liking, perception of the other's liking, and matching on the change in the estimate of the partner's BSRI from time one to time two, two 2 x 2 analyses of covariance were performed. The first included the factors of matched or unmatched pairs and high (N = 26) or low (N = 26) liking based on a median split. Results were not significant for either factor. A similar analysis using the estimate of the other's liking (also based on a median split) and matching was not significant. (N of high liking = 24; N of low liking = 28.)

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

According to these data, a person's perception of the partner on the BSRI did not change over time. The mean difference between the two BSRI estimates was -0.14. This result was unexpected given the theoretical formulation that people behave differently with time in a relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1974; Levinger & Snoek, 1972). It is probably attribu-

table to the fact that partners did not actually develop a relationship during the course of the study. In data gathered at time two, 86.54% of the respondents felt they did not get to know their partner well over the course of the study. Almost the same number (84.62%) felt their partner did not get to know them well either. Most, 67.31% of the students, did not see their partner outside of class, 15.39% saw their partner only once a month; an additional 5.77% saw their partner only three times per month. Only 13.46% of the students saw their partner once a week or more during the course of the study.

It might also be suggested that individuals, not knowing their partners, completed their estimates of the partner on the BSRI as if they were completing it for themselves. This possibility is enhanced by the significant correlation between one's own BSRI score and the estimates of the BSRI of the partner at both time one and time two.

A real test of the hypothesis that interaction follows cultural guidelines until individuals, in the course of a relationship, work out a system of mutually-agreed-upon norms, can only occur in a situation wherein repeated interaction is both possible and likely. Plans to conduct such a study are currently underway.

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Table 1

Correlations of Liking Indices

Index	Time 1		Time 2	
	P's liking for O	P's estimate of O's liking for P	P's liking for O	P's estimate of O's liking for P
Time one				
O's liking for P	.31*	.22	.13	.21
O's estimate of P's liking for O	.43**	.52***	.27	.49***
Time two				
O's liking for P	.33*	.22	.20	.30*
O's estimate of P's liking for O	.43**	.48***	.30*	.50***

Note. Correlation coefficients are Kendall's tau for matched pairs.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.

Table 2

T-tests of the Mean Difference between Partner's BSRI Score and Estimates of the Partner's BSRI Scores and Zero

Difference Score	M	t-score
Time one		
Partner's BSRI minus Other's estimate of it	0.10	0.64
Other's BSRI minus Partner's estimate of it	0.52	1.91
Time two		
Partner's BSRI minus Other's estimate of it	-0.05	-0.28
Other's BSRI minus Partner's estimate of it	0.40	1.53

Note. None of the results is significant.

Table 3

Correlations between Partner's BSRI and the

Estimate of the Other's BSRI

Pairings	Time one	Time two
Partner's BSRI score with the other's estimate of it	.54***	.36**
Other's BSRI score with the partner's estimate of it	.35**	.34*

Note. Correlation coefficients are Kendall's tau for matched pairs.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.

Table 4

Matching x Liking and Matching x Estimate of Other's Liking Analyses of Covariance on Change in the Estimate of the Other on the BSRI

Source	df	SS	F
Matching	1	0.33	0.80
Liking for the partner	1	0.49	1.16
Matching	1	0.42	1.01
Estimate of the partner's liking	1	0.80	1.93

Note. No results are significant.